

## Sensory politics of food pedagogies

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## SENSORY POLITICS OF FOOD PEDAGOGIES

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In our call for this special issue, we sought submissions that offered analyses of the sensory politics of food pedagogies. Influenced by the aims of *Locale*, we asked for articles that had a local, national or regional focus on the Pacific Rim across Asia, Oceania, North and South America, including intersections with global and diasporic perspectives. Our call was motivated by our ongoing interest in food pedagogies which we and other scholars have been researching for a few years now. By food pedagogies, we refer to attempts by a range of agencies, actors, institutions and media to ‘teach’ about growing, shopping, cooking, eating, and wasting food (Flowers and Swan 2015; Leahy and Pike 2015; Etmanski 2015; Sumner 2013). By teach, we mean various processes of formal, informal and incidental education and learning, inside and beyond the classroom. Examples of formal food pedagogies include cooking courses, health education, nutrition workshops, and culinary tours; informal food pedagogies encompass such activities as museum food exhibitions, TV cooking shows, community gardening projects, food activist campaigns, and food industry marketing; and incidental food pedagogies cover learning from eating and drinking, at

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work, at home, in restaurants, farmers' markets and large-scale food events such as festivals. Thus, food pedagogues include: museum curators, health workers, food tour guides, nutritionists, teachers, food activists, food producers and retailers, celebrity chefs and celebrity farmers.

Our definition draws from Australian and American scholars who use pedagogy as an analytic to study cultural and social processes and relations which attempt to 'modify how we act, feel and think' (Watkins, Noble and Driscoll, 2015; Luke 1996; Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick 2011). In essence, 'culture can and does operate in pedagogical ways' (Hickey-Moody, Savage and Windle 2010, p. 227). Using pedagogy as an analytical lens means examining the pedagogical dimensions of processes found in social theory such as socialisation, reproduction, interpellation, embodiment (Watkins et al., 2015). In relation to food, attention turns to analysing how forms of food subjectivity and food conduct are 'capacitated, regulated and shaped' (Watkins, Noble and Driscoll, 2015) in gendered, racialised, heteronormative and classed ways across public, private and domestic spheres (on the latter, see the germinal and somewhat under-valued work of Carmen Luke, 1996).

The catalyst for the special issue was our observation that whilst there is an established interdisciplinary field of sensory studies and a growing literature on food pedagogies, the two have yet to be put in dialogue. In particular, we wanted submission to foreground the raced, gendered and classed politics of interconnections between food, senses and pedagogies. Sensory studies have investigated the sensorial regimes, orders and dimensions of diverse institutions from museums to markets; and practices from art, sport, food consumption, tourism, and city regeneration in different regions and countries (Agapito, Mendes and Valle 2013; Berg and Sevon 2014; Classen 1999; Classen, Howes and Synnott 1994; Clintberg 2015; Dann and Jacobsen 2003; Degen 2008, 2010; Howes, 2003, 2005, 2006; Low 2005, 2009, 2012, 2013; Pan and Ryan 2009; Pinch and Bijsterveld 2013; Rhys-Taylor 2013; Wise, 2010, 2011). Whilst historically much of this focused on EuroAmerican contexts, there is growing research across the Pacific Rim, with Kelvin Low, in particular, pioneering studies in Asia (2005, 2009, 2012, 2013; Low and Kalekin-Fishman 2010). In essence, these studies stress how important it is to denaturalise the senses and examine how—smell, sight, taste, touch and hearing—shape, organise and are constituted by social interactions, encounters, spaces and relations.

Although food pedagogies don't feature strongly in sensory scholarship, food does. One significant strand is scholarship which examines the sights, smells, textures, rhythms, sounds and tastes of food encounters in urban food spaces such as multicultural shopping malls, markets, food courts, restaurants and cafes, and in relation to food activism, culinary tourism, and food festivals (Berg and Sevon 2014; Bishop 2011; Choo 2004, 2011; Degen 2008, 2010; Duruz 2011; Flowers and Swan forthcoming; Hayes-Conroy and Martin 2010; Highmore 2008; Longhurst, Ho and Johnston 2008, 2009; Low 2005; Low and Kalekin-Fishman 2010; Modlik and Johnston 2017; Rhys-Taylor 2013; Solomon 2014; Thomas 2004). Food, nostalgia, memory, and the senses come together in intercultural relations and sensorial socialities (Choo 2004, 2011; Wise 2010, 2011; Highmore 2008).

These studies highlight how the senses in relation to food operate through commodification, hierarchisation and inequality. In particular, urban multicultural (Rhys-Taylor 2013), or what Amanda Wise calls 'sensuous multicultural' (2010), shapes and is shaped by the senses, and structured by histories of racialisation, colonisation, class and gender (Law 2005). In his studies, Simon Choo (2004, 2011) foregrounds cultural and religious negotiations around the sharing of food, intercultural sensoriality and the tastes, smells, sights, textures and sounds of Malaysian food.

In opposition to the breathless idealisation of sensory multiculturalism in popular media and marketing, scholars stress that sensory contact can discomfort, disorientate and assault (Degen 2008, 2010; Highmore 2008; Low 2013 and Longhurst et al., 2008, 2009). We are reminded to be cautious about 'sensory romanticism' and remember that sensuous proximities around food can sustain disgust and racism. Moreover, Jon Holtzman (2006) and Kelvin Low (2013) critique the 'sensory bias' of research on Eurocentric middle-class epicureanism. As Low argues, cross-cultural sensory encounters are unavoidable and therefore we need 'to critically appraise meeting points of dissimilar sensory knowledge and use among different groups of social actors' (2013, p. 224). Accordingly, attention needs to be given to the hierarchisation of sensory practices by gender, class and race (Classen 1999; Clintberg 2016; Low 2013; Sutton 2010).

Discussions of power and politics come to the fore in studies of the manufacture and commodification of food senses. For instance, Monica Degen shows how the design of

public spaces reorganises the sensory qualities of places, commercialising ‘sounds, smells, tastes and feelings’ (2008, p. 17). Laura Marks (2008) underlines how capitalism sells food connoisseurship for class distinction. Harris Solomon (2014) examines the politics of pizza marketers who undertook sensory experiments in pizza restaurants in Mumbai to ‘fine-tune’ classed aesthetics and train aspirant workers. Tourism and management studies have critiqued the marketing and promotion of the senses and sensory branding of places (Pan and Ryan 2009; Dann and Jacobsen 2003; Berg and Sevon 2014).

A vital aspect of sensory politics is the racialisation of smell, particularly in relation to food (Banes 2006; Cover 2013; Han 2007; de Souza 2016; Smith 2007; Manalasan 2006; Springgay 2011; Sutton 2010). For instance, Mark Smith (2007) writes about the sensory history of race and racism, the racialisation of smell, ‘sensory stereotypes’ in his study of the white American construction of the ‘sensory inferiority’ of Black Americans in the nineteenth century. Through specific sensory regimes, smells are powerful racial markers of neighbourhood, and smells of food are used to ‘classify, denigrate and self-exoticise’ (Sutton 2010, p. 214; Cover 2013). As Martin Mansalan writes, ‘the immigrant body is culturally constructed to be the natural carrier and source of undesirable sensory experiences and is popularly perceived to be the site of polluting and negative olfactory signs’ (2006, p. 41). In this way, Sally Banes argues that stigmatisation of the Other’s smell ‘creates an ideological representation of the West as odorless and therefore neutral and the norm’ (2006, p. 35). At the same time, minoritised groups mobilise food smells politically to create spaces of belonging as in Lisa Law’s (2001) study of Filipino maids’ creation of a food sensory landscape in Hong Kong. Broadening studies of senses and race beyond smell, Emily Walmsey (2005) shows how race in Ecuador is understood through taste and place.

These studies have much to offer research on how food pedagogies—from food activism to health promotion—mobilise, train and prohibit senses; and how race, gender, heteronormativity and class are reproduced and performed through sensory practices. Incipient scholarship on this topic include studies on how smell, touch, taste, sight, rhythm and sound in relation to food production and consumption are the target of formal and informal pedagogies, and constitute forms of knowledge and social distinction. For instance, in their significant body of work, Alison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy (2008; Hayes and Martin 2010) investigate how food activist events teach sensory class and race distinctions which

stigmatise eating practices. In a ground-breaking article, Emilia Sanabria (2015) examines the ‘sensorial pedagogies’ of health promotion practitioners to reduce obesity in France which promote pleasure and sensuality in their strategies where informing eaters is deemed ineffective. With a focus on food, art and what she calls ‘sensational pedagogies’, Stephanie Springgay (2011) foregrounds the viscosity of domination and argues that the senses affect how we create knowledge. In a study of Australian Vietnamese tour guides, we show how they teach middle class white tourists how to appreciate Vietnamese dishes sensorially and aesthetically (Flowers and Swan, 2019). In their study of Vietnam, Muriel Fugiué and Nicolas Bricas (2010) reveal how the replacement of fresh food markets by modern supermarkets marginalise traditional consumer sensory food knowledges. This body of work outlined here underlines the power relations, and politics of sensory knowledge and education.

Motivated by these stimulating ideas, our aim in this special issue was to extend the scholarship through a focus on informal and formal food pedagogies, and their politics in the Pacific Rim. We had a number of guiding topics, questions and themes which we hoped submissions would attend to in varying degrees:

### **Teaching food senses**

- How are bodies taught food senses and to what ends? What kinds of food sensory registers or knowledges are deployed? How are food sensory knowledges inflected by, or constitute race, gender, class and heteronormativity? How do they reproduce inequalities?
- What kinds of sensory expressions, languages, vocabularies – senses as modes of knowing (Low 2013) – are inculcated by food pedagogues and how do these mediate sensory experiences?
- How are food pedagogical curricula – for example, in schools, museums, culinary tours, fresh food and supermarkets, art events/galleries, museums, community gardens, food festivals – shaped by the senses and sensory regimes? What kinds of sensory registers, orders and hierarchies are produced? What educational and learning methods are deployed? What kinds of sensory relations are performed? How do these configure or consolidate inequalities?

- How do food media educate the senses? How have TV programmes, cooking classes, and culinary tourism changed taste and food senses?
- In what ways is food activism shaping and being shaped by sensory epistemologies? How do food activists seek to educate sensory perceptions and experiences? Which kinds of senses are marginalized or stigmatized?
- How are food and the senses taught through digital food cultures and media?
- How are food senses and sensory experiences orchestrated, marketed, packaged and commodified through taste education and food pedagogies? In what ways are food producers and retailers shaping food sensory regimes and orders?

## Politics of food senses

- How are sensory stereotypes constructed and reproduced in food pedagogies?
- How are food senses hierarchised as social distinction through food pedagogies? How are dominant and subordinate food sensory orders organised through food pedagogies? What kinds of sensory principles and registers are promulgated and which marginalised?
- What are the racial dimensions of smell, sound, touch, taste, etc? What racialised, gendered and classed meanings of food and senses are taught and learnt?
- Who – middle class foodies, elite chefs and food critics, migrant restaurateurs, health advocates, ‘ordinary consumers’ or others – are setting agendas for influencing food senses? Who has sensory power and how does it manifest?
- What kinds of sensorial appraisals are trained? How are these inflected through notions of good and bad diets, ‘local’ and ‘foreign foods’?
- What kinds of unpaid and paid, invisible and visible sensory work/labour is undertaken and by whom in relation to food? How does this sensory work get represented on TV, films, media and popular culture?

Our special issue contains four peer-reviewed articles and one visual essay which speak in different ways to our call. Below we introduce the papers and surface key themes and connections to the questions and aims of the call.

The special issue starts with Ruth Barcan's paper, entitled *Back to the Future: Australian Suburban Chicken-Keeping as Cultural Pedagogy and Practice Revival*. Drawing on rich data and nuanced theoretical framing, Barcan's paper focuses on small-scale, domestic urban chicken-keeping which she argues is a form of cultural pedagogy. We begin with Barcan's paper because the author provides a review of cultural pedagogy theories, and highlights their call for the mapping of pedagogical processes, practices and temporalities. Barcan analyses actually-existing pedagogical processes in urban chicken keeping to show how learning is not just about attitude change but embodied, affective social practices and the rhythms, habits, durabilities in learning about chicken-keeping. In line with our call, Barcan underlines how learning derived from keeping chickens involves human and chicken bodies, emotion, pleasures, fantasy and 'practice memory'. Urban chicken keepers are motivated by the sensory, tactile and embodied pleasures of having chickens as they learn temporal rhythms, new habits and forms of care. These deep pleasures denote an "aesthetic of sustainability" (Classen, 2009/10: 73 cited Barcan). Enthusiasts learn about the practicalities of bird welfare and husbandry, but also 'little pockets of life that stand ...to one side of, the dominant system of marketised consumption.' Barcan's attention to the sensory dimensions of learning illuminates "how people learning about food goes beyond cognitive, information transfer or ideological influence" (Flowers and Swan, 2015: 5). Moreover, her paper extends current thinking about food pedagogies to reflect on the temporality and durability of urban chicken keeping from the past into the future. A sensory lens on cultural pedagogy enables us to see non-humans such as chickens as teachers.

The next paper by Jacqui Newling, *The 'eeeuw' factor: the viscerally sensorial realities of being the Colonial Gastronomer*, describes a much more conflicted sensory pedagogy. Newling undertakes an auto-ethnographic study of her learning about Australian colonial foods in her role as gastronomer for Sydney Living Museums. Describing in some detail her preparation of calves' heads and preparing and cooking foods that many Australian people find offensive, distasteful, disgusting and 'gross': calves' feet jelly, boiled calves' heads, brawned pig's face, peeled tongues, and collared eels as a double pronged pedagogical project, first, in her learning about the history of the preparation of the dishes and secondly her using this learning to educate the museum public. The focus of her paper is a reflexive account of how cooking and tasting the dishes arouse her disgust and fascination, including a discussion of the classed and racialised histories of disgust. Outlining embodied



pedagogical processes, Newling shows how she learned about the visual, textural, aromatic and taste qualities of the ingredients and resulting dishes eaten in colonial times and the preparation processes and labour of Colonial cooks. In particular, she is keen to understand her conflict between her socio-moral sensibilities in relation to the animals and positive mimetic experiences of working with foods that elicit disgust. Newling underlines that the pedagogical processes of using academic texts, cookbooks and food histories, digital online forums, YouTube footage, television documentaries and historical cookery programs and expertise from industry specialists does not provide the embodied and sensory knowledge of following a history recipe, recreating the dish and encountering the materiality of the animal parts, which act like instructor, “active agents” in interpreting the recipes. Newling is alluding to the power of experiential learning, as opposed to abstract and didactic instruction. In another respect, Newling is pointing to pedagogy in museums being made more effective by leaning on the sensory properties of food.

In a paper entitled *Pleasures, Perceptions and Practices: Eating at a Uruguayan Social and Sporting Club*, Elsher Lawson-Boyd turns our attention to sensory experiences that have less to do with visceral reactions to the visual, olfactory and textural properties of dishes and more with pleasures in commensality. Drawing on her ethnographic research in a Uruguayan Social Club in western Sydney where she worked, she sees her analysis as an intervention into public health pedagogies, and in particular, the Australian Dietary Guidelines. In her view, the guidelines aim to operate pedagogically in order to influence people’s actions, feelings and thoughts in relation to healthy eating. But Lawson-Boyd claims the guidelines are pedagogically flawed because they ignore people’s pleasures in food and eating. The Guidelines’ fail to recognise the body as a ‘fleshly’ entity (Lupton, 2017: 92). Providing illustrative quotes from people who work and attend the club of Uruguayan, Argentinian, Polish, Chilean, Italian and Spanish backgrounds, she draws from interview data and field notes to stress that eating has to be understood as a spatial, embodied and sensory practice. As a result, health promotion policies need to understand that eating is comprised of materialities, memories, social relations, bodies, and feelings. In particular, she argues that food pleasures may be an important and valuable part of good health and wellbeing.

Finally, we include two papers in the special issue about the sensory pedagogies of food illustrations: Laurel Cohn’s article about young children’s picture books and entitled “*That*

*wind is as warm as honey toast”: The language of food in contemporary Australian picture books; and Linda Knight’s visual essay based on her watercolour and ink illustrations of food, The sensational and pedagogical affects of food illustrations.*

A significant contribution of Cohn’s paper is that she examines a neglected food pedagogical visual and verbal text—young children’s picture books. To date, most studies of food pedagogies examine media and policy texts. Cohn’s paper responds to our call by exploring how the textual elements—images and words on the page—constitute an ‘incidental’ food pedagogy. By this, she means that young children and the adults learn about food practices and gendered roles even though authors, illustrators and publishers do not intend to ‘educate’ their readers about food. Through a close reading of illustrations, Cohn argues that the books influence meanings about what foods are good to eat and what foods are good to think about. She proposes that meanings are communicated through an interplay of textual elements—words and pictures on the page—and extratextual elements—in particular, sense memory and sensory ideation. Thus, illustrations evoke children and adult’s ‘sense memories’ of taste, smell and touch and ideas of taste, smell and texture are employed by writers and illustrators. Cohn concludes that her paper contributes to an understanding of what we are feeding the imagination of readers.

We conclude the special issue with a visual paper or photo-essay entitled *The sensational and pedagogical affects of food illustrations* by Linda Knight who is an early childhood studies academic, arts based researcher and artist. Each year she participates in *Inktober*, a month-long annual art project. For the past two years, she has painted images of raw fruit and vegetables, and other foodstuffs such as convenience foods. Knight show us digital images of six watercolour and ink drawings of fruit, nuts and noodles which are culturally associated with different racialised groups, for instance, Indigenous people and the native Australian lillipilli and Asian groups and the fruit, durian. In her extended abstract, Knight reflects on how producing the illustrations constituted a sensational pedagogy. Thus, Knight learned more about the food as she painted them, drawing on her memories of food, the aesthetic and formal properties of the food and desk-based studies about their cultural histories. She also learned about the capacities of food images to produce sensations as the images she posted on social media prompted her viewers to share their cultural, family, racial and sensory memories and reactions. Knight’s paper feeds into emerging scholarship

on digital food cultures, where much of the focus has been on food blogs, foodie visual aesthetics and sharing of food porn images on Instagram and Facebook. In discussing digital images of watercolours, Knights asks us to think more widely about food images. Indeed, Anna Lavis (2017) has argued that we could understand food as media and media as food. Knights provides a few reflective questions for readers of the journal to contemplate.

## **Future agendas**

The papers in the special issue extend our understanding of food pedagogies and the senses in several ways. Barcan, Cohn and Knights draw our attention to memories, and in Barcan's case, memories in the form of nostalgia that may have never happened. Cohn and Knight highlight the sensory and affective pedagogical effects of representations of food – illustrations in story books and online. In contrast, Barcan and Newling help us think about the role, and materiality of the non-human in food pedagogies, including live chickens and butchered calves' heads. Both could inspire us to reflect on the ethics of eating animals and how animals teach us. Lawson-Boyd turns to existing public pedagogy in the form of the Australian Dietary Guidelines and argues the Guidelines are an inadequate pedagogy for healthy eating because they marginalise emotions and embodiment. In relation to our questions of race, class and gender, and hierarchies and inequalities, submissions have less to say: Cohn discusses the whiteness of children's picture books briefly, Knights and Lawson-Boyd allude to cultures and ethnicities. Questions of power and knowledge, expanding pedagogical sites and the visible/invisible labour underpinning sensory pedagogies still need addressing. Barcan usefully works through Watkins et al.'s (2015) concepts of pedagogies as capacitating and habituating and their argument that we need to examine how pedagogies actually do capacitate and habituate bodies and senses offers an important line of inquiry. The special issue has opened up a number of sensory pedagogical practices, opening up what we understand by both concepts but there is much more work to be done to examine the racialised, classed and gender politics of sensory pedagogies.

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